Skier visits surge at Tahoe resorts

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

Lake Tahoe’s ski resorts are reporting their best business in four years, buoyed by unusually abundant snow and an improving Northern California economy.

The number of skier visits at the Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, for example, has jumped 21% so far this season compared with the prior one, while the resort’s revenue has increased 15% despite discounting. The



Reduced season pass prices have helped increase traffic at Squaw. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort has seen a 10% rise in skier visits, while Squaw Valley USA said visits have soared 46%, in part because of a steep cut in season-pass prices.

Read the whole story

Fire damages South Tahoe vacation home

A vacation rental partially went up in flames Saturday night in South Lake Tahoe.

The kitchen and living room of the two-story house at 1361 June Way was engulfed in flames and smoke when firefighters arrived.

â€œAn aggressive interior attack limited the damage to heavy fire damage to the kitchen and living room, with moderate to heavy smoke and heat damage to the rest of interior of the house,â€ a press release says.

The occupants of the house were out to dinner when the fire started. No injuries were reported.

The cause of the blaze is under investigations.

Mancuso 12th; Vonn dominates super G

By USSA

ST. MORITZ, Switzerland -â€“ In her last race before the Vancouver Olympics, Lindsey Vonn (Vail, CO) won her third consecutive Audi FIS Alpine World Cup super G to lock up her second straight discipline title Sunday in Switzerland.

“I skied aggressively and that’s exactly what I wanted to do, not only for today, but also to give me confidence going into Vancouver,” Vonn said.

With 440 points to 220 for Swiss Fabienne Suter, the two-time defending overall champion assumes an insurmountable lead in the discipline with only two events remaining on the World Cup calendar post Olympics.

Vonn’s ninth win of the season ties her own American record and leaves her one short of Bode Miller’s still-active mark for most wins by a U.S. skier (32). Vonn also expanded her overall lead to 137 points over Germany’s Maria Riesch.

With the World Cup on hiatus until after Vancouver, the speed team will take a day off before starting their pre-Olympic prep at their European Training Base in Kaprun, Austria, while the technical group will return stateside.

The women’s team will arrive in Vancouver Feb. 9 with the opening event on Feb. 14 with the Olympic super combined.

St. Moritz, Switzerland, Jan. 31, Women’s Super G

1. Lindsey Vonn, Vail, CO, 1:01.77

T-2. Andrea Fischbacher, Austria, 1:01.94

T-2. Marie Marchand-Arvier, France, 1:01.94

4. Fabienne Suter, Switzerland, 1:01.98

5. Tina Maze, Slovenia, 1:02.00

–

12. Julia Mancuso, Olympic Valley, CA, 1:02.57

25. Stacey Cook, Mammoth Mountain, CA, 1:03.06

29. Leanne Smith, Conway, NH, 1:03.12

32. Chelsea Marshall, Pittsfield, VT, 1:03.30

33. Megan McJames, Park City, UT, 1:03.36

42. Alice McKennis, Glenwood Springs, CO, 1:03.90

48. Keely Kelleher, Big Sky, MT, 1:04.60

Teter third in X Games superpipe, Hight sixth

By Lindsey Sine, USSA

ASPEN – With thousands of her hometown fans cheering her on, the first lady of Aspen, Gretchen Bleiler threw down a huge 900 on the first hit of her second run to win her fourth Winter X Games gold. In what will hopefully be a prelude to what they have in store for Vancouver, Bleiler's Olympic teammates Kelly Clark (Mt. Snow, VT) and Hannah Teter (South Lake Tahoe, CA) joined her on the podium in second and third.

"My second run everything went right. Everything felt like it had amplitude. I finally went with the gravity of the halfpipe instead of fighting against it," Bleiler said. "I didn't doubt myself, I just went for it and definitely the support of Aspen helped me get there."

Clark was leading the women's field after the first run when Bleiler went to town on her second shot, throwing a 9 with confidence that set her up to slay the remainder of her run, locking her in the first spot.

"I think I wanted it so badly that I threw it so hard and it just came around corked. It felt so much better that way. I'm

going to be working on that one and bringing it back," Bleiler said. "I finally feel like I'm riding to my potential. This is great momentum for me and knowing that I am capable of this brings confidence."

Clark came back with incredible amplitude in run three, but still wound up 0.66 behind Bleiler when all was said and done. But, it was thanks to Clark's ability to unabashedly go for it in the pipe that had Bleiler wanting to go further.

"This girl has been riding so well all year long. I've just been watching her in awe. I was inspired tonight to go for it as well. She lets it go like no one else lets it go," Bleiler said.

As for Clark, the night was more about being able to do what she set out to – being able to pull out and land her big tricks – as opposed to ending up on top.

"I was so happy to have landed the run that I set out to do, especially after falling second run and coming back third run and rising to the occasion," Clark said.

There was added excitement in the air for the women, who will shortly make their way to Vancouver for the 2010 Games, as each recognized the night in Aspen was filled with remarkable riding.

"Gretchen rode amazing, Hannah rode great and that was one of the best women's finals I've ever seen," Clark said. "I think we all take a lot of momentum any time we're standing on the podium of a high profile event. There's no better way to prepare for an event like the Olympics."

And, with a few weeks to go, Clark's already got a thing or two in mind for the halfpipe at the Olympics.

"I have the run that I'm planning for Vancouver, and I'm going to stick to that plan," Clark said.

As for the reigning Olympic champion, Teter divulged a plan for the Games that had the reporters at Winter X laughing.

“I’m going to eat a lot of ice cream,” she said, pointing to her brand of Ben and Jerry’s. “I’ll drink a ton of Amp, and then I will be ready to try to take it.”

With one day left in Winter X Games 14, skiercross, mono ski cross and snowboard slopestyle athletes are geared up to compete Sunday.

Winter X Games 14, Aspen, Jan. 30, Women’s Halfpipe

1. Gretchen Bleiler, Aspen, CO, 96.66

2. Kelly Clark, Mt. Snow, VT, 96.00

3. Hannah Teter, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 70.00

4. Soko Yamaoka, Japan, 66.00

5. Ellery Hollingsworth, Stratton, VT, 46.66

6. Elena Hight, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 39.33

Lake Tahoe ski report, Jan. 31



More sunshine than clouds is filling the Lake Tahoe Basin this morning. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Lakeview Commons inches closer to reality

By Kathryn Reed

The $6 million question is: When will the state have that sum to give to the California Tahoe Conservancy so South Lake Tahoe can go forward with the Lakeview Commons project?

Itâ€™s possible the state will try to sell bonds this spring before the governorâ€™s May budget revision comes out. Bond sales last fall were less successful than what those on the receiving end had hoped for so people are guarded about showing enthusiasm and optimism about the next go-round.



Picnic areas will be improved at El Dorado Beach. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Lakeview Commons is the beautification project at El Dorado Beach that has been in the planning stage for about seven years. Once the money is in hand, the city is ready to go out for bid. All the permits have been secured. Money to pay for the project is the stumbling block.

The CTC board on Friday approved spending the $6 million on this project when the cash is available. The money will come from Proposition 84 bond sales and Lake Tahoe license plate fees.

Because bids are usually only good for 90 days, the city wants to wait until the money is secure before finding a contractor.

â€œThe timing is critical,â€ Assistant City Manager Rick Angelocci said after the vote. â€œItâ€™s possible we could get it all done in 2011.â€

With a limited building season in the Lake Tahoe Basin, awarding a bid in summer would amount to only two months of work being able to be completed before the rule of no more moving dirt takes affect Oct. 15.

Lakeview Commons is the first phase of what is also known as the 56-acre project. The rest of the acreage is on the other side of Highway 50 and includes Campground by the Lake.

On the lake side, improvements could be phased in depending on how much bond money flows to the CTC.

The deteriorating retaining walls will be replaced. A cantilevered pedestrian walkway will be constructed that will almost parallel the bike trail.

â€œWhen it is built it will be the icon of the South Shore. You will feel like you are floating above the lake,â€ Peter Eichar, with the CTC, told the board.

A concession stand with rest room and storage for non-motorized boats will be erected.

Improvements will also be made to the street level.

Access to the beach will meet the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

Much of the work to be done is on El Dorado County property that is leased by the city. The memorandum of understanding between the governments had to be amended and was finally approved by their respective elected officials this month.

Lake Tahoe Music Festival sets 2010 dates

The dates are set for another summer under the stars at the Lake Tahoe Music Festival – July 22â€“Aug. 7.

The North Shore festival annually draws more than 12,000 concert-goers for an unmatched outdoor concert experience with tickets from $25 and a lineup of nationally recognized artists.

Concerts include a variety of musical genres from classic rock to classical and Broadway with past artists including Boz Scaggs, Huey Lewis and The News, Dave Koz and Chris Botti.

The summer concert series supports the nonprofit festivalâ€™s educational outreach programs which include an Orchestra Academy for aspiring college-level musicians and a free after-school instruction program for elementary school music students in the Truckee area.

For more information about the 2010 Lake Tahoe Music Festival, visit www.TahoeMusic.org or call (530) 583-3101.

Granlibakken embraces fun and relaxation

By Susan Wood

TAHOE CITY – Granlibakken means “hillside sheltered by fir trees: in Norwegian, but it should stand for recreation meets relaxation in English.

One of the Lake Tahoe Basin’s best kept secrets, the 74-acre resort nestled in a mountain valley a half mile south of Tahoe City is a kids’ paradise where the outdoors meets the outgoing. Children of all ages and seniors who are young at heart can appreciate the healthy blend of Tahoe-type activities and the history behind the resort.



Granlibakken's ski and sledding hills. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On one recent Saturday morning steps from the resort’s main lodge, families seeking snow play covered the sledding and ski hill. A Poma lift and rope tow assist skiers and boarders; sledders must walk. The chatter and squeals made it clear how much fun can be had on a saucer, toboggan or skis.

Granlibakken Conference Center & Lodge employee Jason Works

said this was a typical Saturday.

“Lots of families come out here,” he said, adding it’s also fun to work at the resort.

It seems to be an ideal spot for little ones learning how to ski. Its wide-open space and easy slope give beginners the security to learn the sport. According to Works, most spend hours going up and down the hill much like a Labrador retriever never tires of chasing a tennis ball.

An adult lift ticket runs $21, children $14.



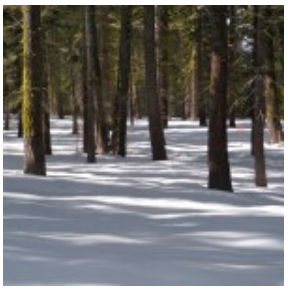
Susan Wood

If skiing the bunny hill or sliding isn’t your thing, snowshoers and cross country skiers can spend the day above the lift. The resort’s hill provides one free ride up to a vast web of groomed and ungroomed trails. A 3-mile round-trip jaunt can weave you through some of the most gorgeous U.S. Forest Service territory on the North Shore to Page Meadows. For the more ambitious, the Granite Chief Wilderness beckons with Scott Peak in the background. Due west, Ward Peak towers in the distance at 8,637 feet.

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association offers snowshoe tours to the meadow.

Kae and I elected to go up the Poma lift to tour a few miles of the snowcat-groomed trails on the ridge. The lift provided the most humbling experience because I had never been on a Pomo on cross country skis. I learned to ski via a Poma in

Vermont at age 6 at the oldest ski area in the United States so I knew I could negotiate the spring-bound pole lift. But on Nordic skis the unloading was awkward. I survived unscathed, but had to pick myself up.



Pristine snow is inches from the groomed trail.

Wide trails make it ideal for skate skiers and those who need to snowplow coming down.

Word to the wise: the topographical map is a little funky when it comes to directions to Page Meadows from the water tank. Don’t head due west. Head slowly south, climbing the ridge before making a sharp northern turn before heading west.

After a day of fun, the resort provides lodging options ranging from studios and townhomes to an eight-bedroom forest lodge chalet and executive lodge suite. The latter is spacious and comfortable with a fireplace and a full kitchen that’s suitable for gatherings. The complex has 45 guest rooms that start at $310/night.

Ski and Stay packages run $109 Sunday-Thursday and $132 on Friday and Saturday.

Summertime comes alive for tennis buffs, as courts are steps away from most units.



Lodging options.

A night’s stay offers access to a heated pool, hot tub and sauna with a full, hot breakfast buffet the next morning. Executive Chef Ron Eber, who’s logged more than a quarter century with the resort, brings out his signature homemade bread pudding to accompany eggs, pastries, pancakes, sausage, coffee, juice and an assortment of fruit. It’s difficult to imagine anyone going away hungry.

In addition to a 16,000-square-foot conference center, the resort features the Cedar House Pub in the main lodge. We didn’t have a chance to eat there, but it looked like a perfect spot to unwind in front of the fire for appetizers or dinner.

Among the historic photos lining the hallways, the most telling for the resort is a large portrait of Kjell “Rusty” Rustad, who in 1947 leased the toboggan runs and undeveloped land from the Forest Service. He improved the ski jumping facilities and cleared timber for the downhill area.

I thought it was fitting that my brush with history as a child brought me decades later to check out the site of this country’s first ski lift – a 600-foot tow rope. The 1932 Olympic ski-jumping trials were staged here, adding to the mystique of the secluded resort.

To this day, the resort still delves into the history of the Tahoe region. It hosted an Olympic Legends‘ dinner earlier this month, which featured the likes of 1960 Winter Games

racer Joe Pete Wilson and cross country ski course groomer extraordinaire Chummy Broomhall.

Staff scurried to make its honorary guests comfortable. Resort Manager Kay Williams appeared quite tickled to hear the Olympic stories from the senior skiers and volunteers and sat with them over breakfast. And, General Manager Ron Parson described the evening in one word: “Incredible.”

For more information, go to www.granlibakken.com.

Stoli party to be part Haiti fund raiser

On Feb. 4 www.7×7.com will have a party for the launch of the Stoli Winter Cocktails at PlumpJack Cafe at Squaw. There will be complimentary bites and Stoli cocktails. The party is from 4-6pm and there will be a photographer and a photo booth.

In addition to the complimentary Stoli cocktails, PlumpJack will be collecting donations for a pediatric hospital in Haiti. It is run by www.artistsforpeaceandjustice.com.

RSVP is required for the event by emailing events@7×7.com.

Stoli cocktail party at

PlumpJack

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